

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

February 18, 2009

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Wally Brownlee. I am here to speak about the Medicaid spend down, veterans benefits, and dental care. Right now I have an \$1800 spend down on a \$1200 monthly income. This means that simple things like getting dental care or hearing aids I can't get. I spent 17 years as a pipefitter and was laid off, tried going back to school, and because of my mental illness I wasn't able to concentrate on my studies. I tried getting help through the normal system and could not get any help. Eventually I applied for VA benefits and that helped but it didn't cover my dental and hearing because I didn't have any related injuries.

No dental coverage means that I can't eat an apple like everybody else. I have to cut it into small portions and mash it with my gums. I am unable to get the dentures that I need.

At one time, I was able to meet my spend down because I wasn't receiving my VA benefits. I feel like I am being punished for having these benefits. If it wasn't for the VA I wouldn't be able to have services like dental, my vision services, and transportation to my appointments. Many people in my situation do not have VA benefits. When I didn't have VA benefits I didn't know what to do. I tried getting psychiatric help and was only able to get medicine for my anxiety and not my major depression. Because I couldn't get medicine for my mental illness I had to give one of children to the state and the other to my niece to take care of. And now through medication I have two of my three children back. Right now, if I had to depend on Medicaid for emergency treatment it would all be out of pocket and I could not pay it.

Currently I live in supportive housing through Reliance House. If I didn't have this I would be living on the street or under a bridge. I am like one of the veterans who would benefit from the supportive housing units that the Governor just took away because many of those units would have been used for veterans.

Spend-down should be eliminated because the people who are affected by the spend-down don't have enough income to pay for these costs. Most people that I know of don't want help from the government. They like being independent but they need medical help to survive.

Thank you for your time.

Wally Brownlee

Norwich, CT